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Dear Michele and Jim --

I will try and proof this letter before putting it into the pouch. Here are a few tidbits from here.

Everything but everything is taking second place to the power struggle between the Army and the Navy. As usual the Army is appearing wooden and the Navy swift!... but the Army has the troops. Of interest, is the fact that the Navy has made Human Rights an issue in the public debate. It clearly is a secondary issue to that of the economy which appears to have settled into a 10% a month inflation rate. All the politicians are getting very excited. Videla is making noises about a possibility of bowing out -- the kind of noises one makes when one wants to hear cries of don't do that. The Army and the Navy are calling up the politicians seeking their advice on how to deal with the problems of the nation. The politicians are loving it, but it is signaling to them that something is shakey with the Military. Harguindeguy went on TV last night to blast all this political talk which will of course add more fuel to the fire.

Tell Judy Chavchavadze (did I get it right) that Brian and I are calling our right of option Embassies meeting next week to compare notes. We had another cordial meeting with San Roman (Asst Secy for internal security in the MININT); we are still holding our breath hoping that they will produce some real info on some of these cases. Right now the RoO program is still dead in the water. The Swedes have given out 20 or so certificates and no one has been approved. The Italians have given out more than 70% or 9 have been granted, 20 denied and the rest are pending within the GOA. They have 450 cases where the application has been filed but the families cannot prove conclusively that the male Italian antecedent came from such and such village. The Italians are planning to tighten up their citizenship law to make it parallel the new Spanish law. It would give citizenship only to persons whose FATHER came from the old country. At present there is no limit on generations but there are real problems on proof.

The Navy has accepted my pitch re the importance of the IAHRC coming. They called me in and said that they wished to invite the IAHRC to come and had communicated this officially to the FORMIN. We do not have any signals from the other two services.

We have been without a secretary for several weeks and my typing is getting somewhat better.

The Massera problem is very tricky. His espousal of the HR cause is greeted by many raised eyebrows here in the Embassy. Many of the same folks who see historical and situational justifications for the government's repression, see sinister and evil motives in the Admiral's privately expressed concerns about the HR situation. The Assembly and other HR groups are aware of the Admirals ambitions (who isn't) but are willing to carefully play MM along, a step at a time. What is important in the long run, may not be whether Massera as a dark horse wins the big political race; but that in running the race he has introduced Human Rights as an issue. That is very important.

We got a fabulous letter today -- a detailed report of the detention and torture facilities at the Mechanical School. The sender claims to have seen the Nun. The smart \$\$\$\$ here believes that it is an Army intelligence black operation but it underscores someone's concern that Massera is running on the HR issue. Or could it be real? I'll send you a copy.

(As you can see I have not figured out all the marks on this new ball that I installed for the letter.)

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Lot 81D208
Box 4963 (2/12)

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Crawford, Director
Exemptions: () In Part (X) In Full
Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to
Release () Excise () Deny

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One of the jargon breakthroughs we have made recently concerns DAMS --Personas bajo disposicion autoridad militar. This is the argot for the ~~XXX~~ disappeared, alive non recognized prisoners. In a casual conversation last week with a military contact, I asked when such DAMS would be recognized and I was told that the PON (ie SOP) was that ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ DAM prisoners' names are secret. I am trying to work out a report listing all the possible places where DAMS could be housed. Most of the places that we know of ~~XXXX~~ are small, with one exception - a recently built military prison outside of Junin, Prov. B.A. We have been told that the new facility has not been placed into service. ~~XXXXXX~~ The attaches have filed an intelligence report about the place and estimate that it ~~wxx~~ would hold up to a 1000 persons with some crowding. I hope that I can get something out that will be meaningful. The problem is that very few people are released from the detention centers which are outside of the law. "

Videla seems to be losing face as a HR type among the HRO's and even with the nuncio here. His recent hardline speeches and the small delivery on his peace by Xmas package have turned people away from treating him specially among the junta members. Massera's HR private pitch have also aided this opinion shift. The most notable event is that of the the Nuncio. When Pat called on the Nuncio, in August, he gave her the full Videla pitch; ~~XXXX~~ he has come around on the issue and now expresses PRIVATE disappointment re ~~the~~ Videla's commitment to HR issues. The Church fathers are huddled this week. The disappearance issue is high on their agenda. It is a very central Christian and humanitarian issue.

One other thought re my number estimates of the last missive. If my central number is correct or in the ball park ~~XXXXXX~~, the Embassy has an 8% sample of the cases which is good enuf for much statistical work. (whether the folks who have registered with us are an accurate sample of the population is another question - we are not dealing with products coming off the production line) I am sending both of you a xerox copy of our card file. There are 999 disappeared and detained cards plus a scattering of others in the list. Does any one have a budget for doing some analysis on a contract basis. What can we learn from this sample?

They have started harassing the mothers group again on the Plaza de Mayo. Evidently, the number of mothers meeting there on Thursday has started to grow. It fell sharply after the leaders were disappeared in early December. Recently, according to the mothers, there have been about 200 mothers present. Last Thursday, the cops moved in and cleared off the entire square. There was no violence; the mothers are becoming experts at civil disobedience - - you only get arrested when you want to be arrested.

I will close with my best regards and a bon mot -- Argentina is the only country in the world where you are safe in the streets, but not in your home.

Cheers,

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